



This semi-annual newsletter is published by the USDA-NRCS Plant Materials Center, 14119 Broad Street, Brooksville, FL 34601-4525, Tel: 352-796-9600, FAX: 352-799-7305. E-mail: clarence.maura@fl.usda.gov

South Florida Can!

The data is in and sun hemp seed can be economically produced in the state of Florida! Sunn hemp is an annual legume that can add over 100 pounds of nitrogen per acre to the soil in one season *and* suppress some types of nematodes. Farmers in the South are very interested in using sunn hemp in crop rotations, but have had a difficult time finding economical seed sources. Most seed is currently imported from Hawaii. In 2000, the PMC coordinated a statewide experiment with 11 field offices and 15 producers to determine zones in Florida where seed could be economically produced. Despite some unusually heavy frosts, growers in coastal counties of south Florida, beginning at approximately the 27th parallel, were able to produce viable seed. One of Naples Field Office DC, Tony Polizos', cooperators (Baron Collier Co.) produced enough seed on 2 acres to combine in June of 2001. Tim Eckert, DC at the Fort Meyers Field Office, worked with cooperator, Sakata Seed Co., who hand harvested 50 pounds of seed, with which they planned to expand production in 2001. Growers in the Homestead area have also been able to produce and harvest seed. The benchmark has been established. South Florida farmers can indeed become seed producers of this valuable green manure crop.

NRCS Employees Tour the PMC

On a sizzling July 24th, the PMC hosted a tour for NRCS field office employees, to inform them of current technology and plant materials developed by the PMC. Fifty people participated in the tour, including employees from other state and federal agencies. NRCS State Office Ecological staff members, Tim Hafner, Pete Deal, Steve Boetger, Sam Sanders, and Jeff Norment, gave presentations and conducted lively discussions at 5 different stops on the Center. Subjects included plants useful for nutrient removal in effluent waste systems, native

grasses which can improve grazing lands, the various uses of perennial peanut for agronomic and turf purposes, native plants useful for coastal dune stabilization, and native species which are useful in wildlife food plots. After a hearty lunch, afternoon sessions were held indoors in air-conditioned comfort. Greg Hendricks gave a presentation on invasive weeds and Rosalind Moore discussed plants useful for wetland restoration. PMC staff rounded out the day with presentations on plant collection, and an overview of current projects, services and types of assistance.

PMC Works with TOPPS Students

TOPPS (Technology Oriented Performance Program) is a "last chance" program in Hernando County, designed to help at risk students earn a high school diploma. It includes a strong vocational emphasis, and all students are members of the Future Farmers of America.

The campus at Springstead, Florida includes a greenhouse. Teacher and co-program coordinator, Royce Green, wanted to use it as part of a curriculum to train students in greenhouse plant propagation. Caring for the plants will help teach students responsibility and good work skills. Mr. Green was interested in growing native plants and contacted the PMC for help.

On October 23, Mary Anne Gonter, Senior Biological Technician, put on two training sessions at Springstead High to show students how to propagate bitter panicum. Students carried out each step in the process from filling trays with potting soil, to properly preparing and planting cuttings in the trays. The students are to care for the plants to maturity, until they can be planted in specified areas in Florida. On October 30, the students toured the PMC to learn more about native plant materials and their role in the environment.

The Four Most Wanted



Four new species have been placed on the PMC collection list for 2001 and 2002. All of these species survived and performed well under extreme drought conditions in recent reclaimed minedland studies. They all have good potential for use in CRP and EQUIP plantings, especially when used as understory in pine plantings. All have either good livestock forage or wildlife cover value. The PMC will be collecting these species over the next year, and would greatly appreciate the participation of field and area office staff. "Wanted" notices containing complete identification and collection information are to be sent to each field office early in 2002, or call the PMC to obtain collection forms and materials.

Grassleaf Goldenaster (*Pityopsis graminifolia*) is a perennial forb typically found in dry pinelands and sandhills, however, it also grows in drier flatwood areas. It has long narrow leaves like grass blades, covered with long silky hairs, which give it a silvery-grayish appearance. Plants are rhizomatous, and are often found in small dense colonies. It grows throughout Florida, and is very noticeable when blooming. A multitude of small yellow flowers are produced October through December on 1 to 3 foot tall multi branched stems. Mature seedheads look like miniature dandelion heads, and seed is easily dispersed by the wind. Seed ripening is very uneven, with flowering and ripening occurring simultaneously for several weeks. Collect seed by tipping ripe heads into a paper bag and tapping the heads against the side of the bag. Hand-held vacuums may also be used.

Creeping bluestem (*Schizachyrium stoloniferum*) is a perennial grass with long scaly rhizomes, and tends to grow in dense spreading colonies. It's found throughout Florida, from wet flatwoods to dry sandhills. Seed is ripe when it can be easily pulled off the seedhead. The collection window is fairly broad (November - December), as mature seed remains on the plant for several weeks barring high winds. Collect seed by clipping seed heads and placing them in a paper bag. This species typically has very poor viable seed production, so a large number of seedheads need to be collected.

Wiregrass (*Aristida beyrichiana*) is a drought tolerant perennial bunchgrass commonly found throughout Florida. It grows in a broad range of

habitats from wet flatwoods to dry sandhills. Leaves are tightly rolled, giving them a wire-like appearance. Wiregrass can be distinguished from similar species by the cluster of white fuzzy hairs growing at the base of the leaves. Plants must normally be burned or clipped very low during the growing season to stimulate seed production. The collection window is fairly broad (late November - early December), with ripe seed remaining on the plant for several weeks. Seed is ripe when it can be easily stripped off the seedhead. Collect by clipping seedheads and placing them in a paper bag.

Pinewoods dropseed (*Sporobolus junceus*) is a perennial bunchgrass that looks very similar to wiregrass. Plants tend to be shorter than wiregrass and do not have the distinctive clump of white fuzzy hairs at the base of the leaf that wiregrass does. It grows in the same habitats as wiregrass, and is generally only distinguishable when blooming. Unlike most other species, pinewoods dropseed flowers in the spring between April and June. It has a very distinctive seedhead, with branches forming a whirled pattern around the stem. Ripe seed are small, round and black in color. The collection window is very narrow as seed drops quickly once it is ripe. Seed tend to ripen from the top down. Seed can be collected by hand stripping ripe seed and placing in a paper bag or envelope.

What Would We Do Without Mary?

The PMC has an angel in disguise by the name of Mary Neron, who faithfully volunteers at the Center for 4 hours every Tuesday morning. Thanks to Mary, the plants in the greenhouse stay cared for and weeded - with a smile! No job is too dirty or too boring for Mary. Her steady cheerful presence helps ease everyone's workload. On the doorway of Mary's home, she and her husband, Ray, have a sign that says, "One nice person and one old grump live here". Mary won't say which one is the old grump, but we have a strong suspicion it isn't her!

